A dissertation, on Hydrocephalus,

by

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Medical Jurisprudence
or
Medico-Legal
Science of Poisons
by
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As in politics a secret enemy is most to be dreaded, so in medicine, those diseases which make their advances by slow and imperceptible degrees, are generally those which ultimately create the greatest alarm and baffle the art of the Physician. It is not that in their incipient stages, diseases of this nature, such as Phthisis, Marasmus, and Hydrocephalus, powerfully resist the agents of the healing art; but they establish their empire over the system with such inconsiderable interference with it's healthy functions that they are very frequently completely fortified from attack before the sufferer is awakened to a sense of his danger.

Among these insidious enemies of the human race Hydrocephalus holds a distinguished rank. Our knowledge of this disease is of modern date; Hypocrates, Celsus, and Celsus speak of "watery effusions" between the surface of the brain and the cranium, but they do not appear to have known of it's existence in the ventricles.

Dr Whytt appears to have been the first who insulated Hydrocephalus from other affections of the head, and the additional observations of Dr Fothergill gave it a distinct character.

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We are next indebted to Dr. Quinn of Dublin, and Dr Rush for a more complete description of the nature of the Hydrocephalus acutus of the former, by the latter termed Phrenicitis. Dr Rush was induced to apply this term to the disease in question, by the consideration that it's commencement was inflammatory and analagous to a lesser degree of Phrenitis forming the first stage of the disease, and the effusion of a fluid the second. Other divisions of the disease have been proposed by various writers, but they appear to have been founded merely on some circumstances attending it's accession, but which do not influence it's termination. A late writer on "Water in the Brain" has divided it into four stages viz. determination towards the head, inflammation, effusion and palsy. This division is at best unnecessarily minute, but this is not all, the first of these stages is rather a state of things existing previously to the actual disease, and the last but a mere circumstance, and not always attending it.

Hydrocephalus is prevalent among infants at the breast and through the earlier years of childhood: adults are however sometimes it's victims. The symptoms which

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characteristic it are as follows: as premonitory to the more decided symptoms of Hydrocephalus, the patient evinces a langour and indisposition to exercise which occasionally remits, and in the interval he is more than usually sprightly. The usual glow of health gradually, but sometimes rapidly declines, the features become contracted, the eyes lose their effusion and a dark colour is sometimes observed around the under parts of their orbits; the skin becomes harsh and more than usually warm, and there are symptoms of superficial The appetite is very variable, sometimes craving for food of a particular kind, or outre articles, the bowels are costive and yield uncommonly consistent fæces by the operation of a cathartic, the tongue is white and dry, after a time the langour and disposition to rest the head become more constant, and headache is occasionally complained of; the eyes become more dull and their pupils dilate, and not unfrequently there appears to be an intolerance of the light, the pulse becomes more frequent and small. These symptoms are not all proper to Hydrocephalus; worms and other causes of gastric and enteric irritation give rise to appearances

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so similar that many practitioners have no doubt been misled by them. But the increased and permanent dilatation of the pupils, pain in the head, aversion to light, the hearing surprisingly acute, strabismus &c. characterise this disease. Pain in the back of the neck, copious discharge of pellucid urine, and fecal discharge, watery, are symptoms which attend the advanced stages of Hydrocephalus and may be regarded as indicating an unfortunate termination.

This account of the disease can only be considered as an outline; we want words to express many of the symptoms and appearances which lead a practical Physician to a knowledge of this disorder, far more certainly than all descriptions we have of "this truly proteiform disease" as Dr. Quin has emphatically called it.

The quantity of fluid collected within the Cranium is very various, sometimes being nearly equal to the whole capacity of that cavity, and at others not exceeding a few drachms: nor does it appear that the violence of the symptoms depends in any considerable degree upon this circumstance.

The cause of Hydrocephalus has been a subject of debate in

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In the first place there is [illegible] [illegible] Phthisis is one of those diseases which is hereditary. It [illegible] in that constitution which has been termed the [illegible] and which is characterised by a frame of body rather delicate, the skin clear and of a light hue, the [illegible] being [illegible] and the intellect acute. Dr Cheyne mentions an instance in which a family lost five of its young men by [illegible] the [illegible] this disease; and he [illegible] that he [illegible] in [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]; and in [illegible] we find the following "Novi familiam cujus infantes circa sextum aetatis annum omnes perierunt ex hoc morbo, sero plurimo tunc effusum [illegible] praebente." — A predisposition appears to be [illegible] by [illegible] [illegible] [illegible], which [illegible], these [illegible], [illegible], which ought to have been noticed. The question, however, whether these ~~[illegible]~~ have effected [illegible]-

dependent, I am inclined to think, rather, or, indeed, wholly, proved by the same circumstance of their being all, and the Apoplectic symptoms.

Many cases of Hydrocephalus have been attributed to stars, to the wind, falls, and other accidents, producing cerebral concussions. The intervals between which too often occur between the accidents and the concussions, the diseases have been so long and so free from any indication of any inflammatory danger, as to render the efficiency of this cause, questionable. I think we may safely assume, authorities to the contrary notwithstanding, that out of one hundred cases of this disease which came under his notice, one only could be traced to a cause of this nature, and in this instance the patient was affected with a violent Catarrh. So that although the evidence of this Gentleman is, in negative character, of strength, it seems to me, exceptionable, because, frequently, follows a severe accident, and this disease may pave the way to Hydrocephalus.

It appears to have been the opinion of Dr Hirsch, that certain circumstances induce a debilitated state of the

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a blood, indeed, is sometimes used and considered as suf-ficiently definitive. [illegible] is most probably of the dis- [illegible] with the [illegible] means.

There is another [illegible] which [illegible] the sympathy which exists between the [illegible] and legs [illegible] is most probably called [illegible] the commencement of the [illegible], who

There are movements, also, though in [illegible] of the [illegible] that [illegible] much more frequently [illegible] in the stomach, than in the other viscera. The [illegible] in consequence of its greater extension, being the organ [illegible] the [illegible] matter destined to the [illegible] which may be [illegible] [illegible], [illegible] [illegible] commencing in [illegible] good [illegible] to [illegible], which become [illegible] until death, and ~~[illegible]~~ [illegible] -ness being [illegible] found in the [illegible]

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[illegible] the [illegible] and the discharge [illegible] favourable; [illegible] the cause [illegible] to [illegible] from this [illegible] arrangement [illegible] but [illegible] and [illegible]; all our efforts, [illegible]

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cloths dipped in water, or vinegar and water, have been made use of in conjuction with blisters.

Setons and Issues have likewise been resorted to; whether they ought to be preferred to blisters is doubtful, in chronic cases, or where there is an hereditary predisposition, as prophylactics they may be employed with advantage. In these cases Monro advises a perpetual issue to be kept discharging at the bregma.

Pedeluvium should not be overlooked in the incipient stage, it produces a determination to the surface, and encourages a larger share of blood from the head and superior extremities, to the lower. Dr. Hunter relates a case in which the vapour bath effected a cure. Quin also speaks favourably of it, as an auxiliary to the more powerful remedies.

Many other remedies might be mentioned here which have been resorted to in this disease at different times, but as they are of doubtful efficacy I shall not notice them. Mercury however is the remedy to which we must effect to be indebted for our general success in the treatment of Hydrocephalus. It should be exhibited not only internally, in the form of Calomel, but we should resort to every possible means of applying it to

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the system with the view of inducing ptyalism.

After effusion has taken place, the administration of medicine will be entirely incompetent to effect a cure; our only resource, in this stage of the complaint, is to the operation of evacuating the fluid. There have been cases in which this drastic remedy alone effected a cure.

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